

SIDE 1:

Question: Mr. Abrams: why was there a war in El Salvador, what were the US objectives and did we achieve them there?

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Abrams: I think there was a war for very deep-seated reasons and less deep-seated reasons. The very deep-seated ones relating to the nature of the political and economic system there which was an unjust system. There was a very small number of people there benefitting at the expense of the mass of Salvadoreans. That was the deep reason. But there was an other reason and that is there was a desire at the part of some Salvadoreans of the far-left, left from our own, with the help of the Soviet Union, Cuba and ultimately

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and very importantly the Sandinistas after their victory in Nicaragua their desire to overthrow the system by force and to create and Communist-Castrist-style system in El Salvador which meant there was no possibility of solving El Salvador's deeper problems without that kind of violent tantrum (?). *conflict*

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We had a security objective in El Salvador which was to prevent a communist victory there. We did not

believe that it was possible to do that without achieving social, political and economical reform in El Salvador. This ultimately would lead people to turn away from the guerrillas and embrace reform as the possibility of democracy. So

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use this

our goal was to help build a more just society in el salvador and defeat the efforts of Salvadorean and foreign communists to establish

a communist system there. Was it
successful? I'd say yes in both
senses. It did defeta the efforts
to establish an other comunist
system there and it did leave
behind a more just, more
democthatic more open society and
by far.

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Question: O.K. I am going to come back to
that but I want to ask you an other
question now. What exactly is your
role in the Salvadorean conflict
and did you yourself and how often
did you go to El Salvador yourself?


Abrams: Well, from 1985, mid -85 through
January of 89 I was the Assistant
Secretary of Sthate for Latin
America which meant that I was very
much involved in US policy toward
El Salvador. I wouldn't really say
making the policy in the sense that

the policy was already made. The policy was made in during the first term of the Reagan administration. We could even argue that it was made during the very end of the Carter administration because that was when the decision was made to go on arming the Salvadorean military. But certainly it was something I worked on I would say almost literally every day within the limitations of US policy in El Salvador.

Question:

Based on that and your role there what is your view? What did the FMLN, the Salvadorean government and the US government, all sort of traditional rhetoric aside - what did each of those really want in El Salvador?

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Abrams:

To answer the previous question

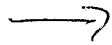
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first: I went to El S. in that period, I don't know, 4 times a year is probably a decent guess I think that's a ball-park figure anyway. In my view the role of the FMLN...

Question: Actually, now that you're answering that. I'm sorry I didn't catch the sense of that is: what did you see there, what did you personally experience when you went out there as Assitan Secretary.

Abrams: Well, trips anywhere as an Asistant Secretary are highly stylized. That is for protocolary and security reasons you don't kind of take off your and go marching around alone neither in the city nor in the country side. The trips are mostly to the capital city and mostly my trips were to San

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Salvador and I did not leave San Salvador and which you end up doing is you see the government people, first the US embassy people and then the salvadorean government people ...(?), people from the church, people from the trade unions, people from the business community and you don't as I said get out that much. But that is what you have the embassy there for to know what is ging on inside the country.

Question:

And what did, in case when you would go there, what would people say from the church and people from the Salvadorean population? What would they tell you about what was ging on? What kind of information would yu get or was it pretty much exclusively from the embassy?

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Abrams:

The vast bulk of information that the State dept. gets comes from the US embassy, for any country you can name. The church was fundamentally concerned with ending the violence I think it's fair to say that was their key concern. The church had a mediating position between the government and the guerrillas. It was never, at least at the highest levels, levels of the Archbishop, it was never pro-FMLN and it understood, I think, that the FMLN was not on its side on the other hand it had no illusions about the government and about the military either. And that, much of the time was at least formally opposed to US military aid to El Salvador. So we're not getting a kind of canned pro-government view from the church. Finding out what the average

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Salvadorean thought was extremely difficult until they started having free elections. I think then you could say you're getting the authentic voice of the Salvadorean people, but certainly when you go back to 81 through 83 very tough to figure out what the people of El Salvador actually wanted.

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Question:

At that time there was a lot of talk about the church and the priests being accused of being communist and being or at least being communist sympathizers. Was that yr view at the time and looking back on it is that an accurate appraisal of the situation or how do you characterize that?

Abrams:

The Salvadorean CHURCH AS A formal entity, the hierarchy, the bishops, was never pro-FMLN. There were

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Salvadoreans who were in the FMLM, there were Salvadoreans who were pro-FMLN and not in it. Amongst them there were certainly clergymen. It would have been extremely odd considering the background of liberation theology and the influence of marxism in Latin America and the Latin church, extremely odd if that were not true. So there were people in the church who were pro FMLN but I think it would be wrong to say that the church was pro FMLN. The church had an independent position which was neither pro-government nor pro FMLN, that is the church as a hierarchic entity.

Question: And so where did this accusation - fairly wide spread from what I understand- of, you know, be a patriot kill a priest- where did

those accusations come from? Why did they reach such a frenzied level if in fact the church was in more of a middle of the road position?

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Abrams:

I think it came from the fact that some people in the church were pro-FMLN, some people in the labor movement were, some people in the human rights movement were. As the FMLN was able to emerge at the end of the war there were newspaper stories in El Salvador repeatedly about people who it turns out now say you know the whole time I was really posing as something else I was really working for the FMLN. So there was such a thing as FMLN front organizations and there was such a thing as people in the church who were pro FMLN so part of it comes out of the facts of the

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situation. Part of it comes out of kind of a frenzied view of the Salvadorean Right that anyone who was not with them was against them. For example, it only did many people on the extreme right consider the church, including the church hierarchy to be basically pro-FMLN but that even Duarte was being pro-FMLN. I was in El Salvador in June of 1993 and had an occasion to say to a business audience that one of the architects of democracy in El Salvador is probably Duarte. I didn't think that was a hotly controversial thing to say, now, but it was. There were newspaper editorials in lot of the newspapers the following days denouncing me, because Duarte was a communist. Well, that current of opinion existed even more strongly back in the middle of the war that

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people like Duarte, people like the church hierarchy and many people or levels of it were either objectively or subjectively pro-communist. That view is wide spread on te far right.

Question:

Now to the next question of what do you think again... what do you think these three groups wanted, the FMLN, the Salvadorean government and the US government through, from your point of view, what do you think they really wanted?

Abrams:

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It's easier for me to talk about the US government and we wanted two things which in our view completely consistant and in fact, which depended on each other. We wanted El Salvador to be a more democratic, more open more just

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society and we wanted a communist defeat and we believed the two depended on each other because you could not by repression, you could not by military means ultimately defeat the FMLN its support emerged out of injustice and oppression in El Salvador to a large degree and until you began to deal with the injustice and the lack of democracy, the lack of opportunity economically you would never really permanently defeat the FMLN. So that's what we wanted. We had those two compatible goals. What did the FMLN want? Well, I think if you go back to 79, 80, 81 the period where the violence really began to blow up a lot, the period of the so-called final offensive. The FMLN wanted what happened in Nicaragua. The FMLN wanted ^{to win} ~~a~~ war. Win meant that as in Nicaragua the power

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structure would be overturned. As in Nicaragua the military would be forced to be decomposed, would collapse and would flee and those who didn't would be jailed and a new regime would be established. They wanted a revolution, not merely change, a revolution, and they wanted to be on top they wanted to run the country just as the FSLM in Nicaragua ran the country in 1979. Now there is more debate to as what they would have done had they won that victory but I think they would have been worse than the Sandinistas. I think if you go back there is no reason to think that the FMLN as then constructed 1980, 81, 82 was really a bunch of social reformers, liberals who wanted to move faster. They said they were marxists, they seemed to admire what was going on

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in Nicaragua and for that matter in Cuba and I think they would have established a fairly familiar type of communist regime I think it would have been fairly bloody and I think if you look at the way they dealt with each other, dissidents within the FMLN which was deadly they would have established a Cuban style communist government. But certainly what they wanted was their kind of revolution. What did the Salvadorean government want? Well that was, there was a split. It depends partially whether you include the military in the government. Some people in the military and some of the civilians like president Duarte wanted a democracy and they wanted I would say the kind of Salvadorean government that we see today. They've got free elections and

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their governments come and go depending on who wins and loses and where there is much more freedom of speech and freedom of press and so forth there is freedom of expression there is freedom for the church and there were some people of course in the government who wanted the status quo. They did not want any of these reforms. They saw those reforms as the new path towards communism. They wanted to defend the old Salvadorean oligarchic and oppressive system and those people were associated with the far right and with the military and of course those two were closely associated too. They were split between what would be generally speaking viewed as good guys and bad guys.

Question: Let me ask you this: the biggest

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issue seems to be at that time the Soviet conspiracy aspect of this that it was in fact Soviet inspired and Cuban inspired. Can you tell me what was for you the compelling proof of Soviet conspiracy in El Salvador and I'm thinking in terms of things like the white paper, you know, and things like that. What exactly was in your eyes what was the conclusive proof that it was soviet inspired and not more towards the grass roots revolution against social injustice?

Abrams:

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We had no conspiracy theory. We did not believe that there was any kind of conspiracy here. Inspiration was a different question and we certainly believed that I don't think the FMLN would deny they were inspired in the moral and intellectual sense by

the models of the Soviet Union, Cuba and especially by the victory in Nicaragua which really proved it could happen. It wasn't crazy to think you could rule in Central America. So they were certainly inspired in the old-fashioned meaning of that sense by those countries and those systems. They were also helped. They were aided in a material sense by the Soviet Union and Cuba and Nicaragua. In the Cuban case for example, the fact that the various groups that made up the FMLN were brought to Havana and were lectured by Castro on the need for unity and on his refusal to help them unless they go together, which they did, to be a more effective fighting force and a more effective political force. That's a form of help but there was also help in the form of

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Shafer Handell

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ammunition, guns, money. We found, for example, ?? of the Salvadorean Communist Party going around the world including to places like Vietnam seeking money and arms. We had plenty of intelligence information about arms that were moving from Nicaragua to El Salvador now I don't think that's in dispute in this sense. Such staunch foes of Reagan policy in Central America as Eddie Bowman(?) *Boland* of the famous Bowman amendment who was chairman of the House Intelligence Committee said he was perfectly satisfied by the evidence that Sandinistas were helping the FMLN. Now it's 1993 and we can see from what the Sandinistas have said since leaving power that it's true. The Sandinistas have admitted sure we helped the FMLN. One can argue that they're still helping the FMLN

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today by allowing te arms stashes in Managua. They have acknowledged that throughout the 1980's they felt that they had a moral obligation to help the FMLN and the did. One can argue how valuable was that help? What would have happened to the FMLN had the Sandinistas frozened them out? A hard question to answer but that the were getting material help in the form of money and guns I think is undeniable and some more important thing: the FMLN had a very sophisticated system with communications and codes. They didn't steal it from the Salvadorean army and they didn't invent it. The got it from their friends in Cuba and Nicaragua. So they got a lot of help.

Question: And in terms of the human cost do you think from my understanding

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speaking ... (?) in El Salvador they say sure we were helped we basically had to go somewhere because we were so out-gunned and outnumbered and when you consider the level of US aid compared to what aid they got from the Sandinistas or from Cuba the question that comes to my mind is given the number of people that were killed and the violence that did happen do you think that it was worth it? Do you think that our level of military aid was worth it to I mean was there any kind of parity for that in terms of the human cost?

Abrams:

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→ The cost in El Salvador was to some degree imposed by the FLMN. The economic cost and the human cost in terms of death was not a decision standing alone by the US

or the Salvadorean military it was also a decision by the FMLN that they were willing to kill people in order to impose Communism in El Salvador despite the fact that there was no evidence that the Salvadorean people wanted it. So I don't think that question can be asked of the US in the abstract without acknowledging one has to ask that same question of the Soviet authorities, of Castro and the FMLN. How many Salvadoreans did they think should die to to build Communism in El Salvador. From the US point of view this is a question you should ask when you're fighting a new war or when you're helping somebody else fighting a war: what are the costs and what are the benefits. The human cost in El Salvador were extremely high however many we'll never quite know

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but there are tens of thousands
Salvadoreans who died in that war.
My answer to that question is Yes.
The government of El Salvador which
was increasingly democratic
overtime asked for help. There was
no evidence that the people of El
Salvador wanted a communist
dictatorship. There was support
from the US for President Duarte in
the US Congress from both parties
and as we look at El Salvador today
that is increasingly I think over
the 90's we will see this
increasingly democratic,
increasingly open, increasingly
prosperous. With that prosperity
more and more widely insured they
are a lot better off than the Cuban
people or than even the Nicaraguan
people. And I wish that not that we
had not helped them I wish that the
FMLN had given up its fight for a

Communist El Salvador a lot sooner.

Question:

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This question just occurred to me its sort of a a little more background and that is that speaking of the El Salvadoreans the idea of who started it going back to 1932 the Matanza the raiding of 30,000 campesinos because of a supposedly communist threat according to them basically what happened starting 1932 from that point on the repression and the killing was so severe and so persistent that really they were pushed against the wall and that there was not there was no other choice but to take up arms and what I hear you say is that if the FMLN hadn't resorted to violence the war could ave ended sooner and there would have been fewer killed. What I am curious about is how did you

repond to the idea that the violence rpovoked by the military provoked the FMLN to take the stance they took. How would you respond to that

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Abrams:

Well, there is no justification seems to me for revolutionary violence in the service of the dicthatorship of the proletariat which is I think what the FMLN was fighting for. It was not going to fight for democracy and so you know the [revolutionary situations can be created by a certain amount of oppression and injustice I think that's true and in the case of El Salvador for example but that doesn't explain then what it is that people choose to fight for and I would dare like to juxtapose the FMLN people with Duarte, Duarte was also fighting for a different El

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Salvador and he was also viewed by the military by many in the military and many in the oligarchy and they hate him to this day. He's dead and they still hate him. [The FMLN was not fighting at that point in my view for a democratic, more open more just El Salvador. They were fighting for a communist system and that cannot be excused on a basis that El Salvador has a history of oppression or injustice.] I think that you have to ask in any situation like that you can ask in any situation of the French Revolution or the Russian revolution is not if there were any justifications for rebelling against an oppressive system but on behalf of what and that's where people split up between those who are democrats and those who are not democrats.

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Question:

Okay. I'm going a little bit to come back to that but my next question is through in the upcoming elections the Christiani government the ruling party already positioned themselves as a moderate government that was caught between extremes - the right and on the left the FMLN - and they're anticipating I was speaking with the UN ambassador the ambassador to the UN in El Salvador and they're very confident anticipating a victory based on that stance. However, I am curious as to what you think the likelihood of that is or the reality of that claim when the Urena Party was in fact founded by Roberto Debussant whose activities with the death squads and the military were known excesses of the military and in fact at the convention and now Mr. Christiani was introduced to the

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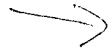
confession by Mr. Debussant. How credible do you find the claim that the Christiani government of the Urena party can hold control of the military and what would it involve?

Abrams:

Well, certainly Christiani was completely uninvolved on the basis of all the evidence anybody ever produced. In fact, I wasn't aware he was ever accused of any involvement. The Urena party grew out the far right, the radical right in El Salvador and converted itself over 5 or 6 or 7 years actually I would even say starting in 83 so let's say 10 years into a political party number 1, that sought power through the ballot and not through violence. Latin America is full of parties that change their spots in one way or another. General ? the dicthator of Bolivia,

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the military dictator came back and ran for office and when he lost he accepted the defeat. The MNR party of Bolivia started as a revolutionary left-wing party. Now it's a radical party in favor of free-market reform. The Peronist party in Argentina I mean the list goes on and on of parties that have changed and then began, without any feelings or desire for democracy a reform I think that's true for the Urena party too. I think it's been a better political party for about a decade and I think it's committed to achieving power only by democracy and leaving power if it loses. So and I think that's probably why he won the elections and I don't think the people of El Salvador would have given him a victory over the Christian Democrats after Duarte unless they

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were persuaded this is not the old gang coming back. This is not if we vote for these people it's not going to be the old military group it's not going to be the old Debussant group. It's going to be a bunch of people who've learned and are breathing democrats and I think their use in office has indicated that that faith is well placed and they might win the election.

Question:

I'm glad you brought up the past elections. From my understanding the elections that one elected Mr. Duarte and then elected Mr. Christiani are considered by many in El Salvador to have been very fraudulent and to have been fixed and basically grabbed by those parties. How do you respond to that?

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Abrams:

Well, I have heard that allegation about the I guess that was the 85 election of Duarte and I responded by saying - as I was in the government at that time - I'm really not committed to answering those allegations. I was out of the government in the Christiani election. There were election observers. They seemed to think it was a pretty good election and I think the charges that it was a fraudulent election are much much less than they were in 1985. In fact, there aren't that many. I think, most Salvadoreans are convinced that that was a real victory in the sense that Salvadoreans were voting against the christian democrats mostly because of corruption. It is true, that the left was not really free, was not truly able to present

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candidates the way the right was in that election. They will be in the next election and it will be very interesting to see just exactly how many votes do they get. I think, they are not going to get a lot many because I think the ballots will prove that the numbers of Salvadoreans who really supported the FMLN is pretty small.

Question:

I want to talk about the truth commission a little bit because that sort of relates to the question before this last one.

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First off: do you accept the figures from the truth commission that 85% of the atrocities and human rights violations during the war were committed by the government?

Abrams:

No. I have no idea what the figure

is but I don't believe they had any kind of -as they say scientific - that maybe asking too much but I don't think they had any really persuasive procedures for really determining the answer to that question so I think we just don't know.

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Question:

So how do you, 'cause my understanding and the research that I've done the people that I've talked to they speak of the repression and one fellow when I went to a mountain village and I was told the history of this town and the entire town was forced to flee where they were because they were unarmed and attacked by te military and many people were killed etc. and they had to go to Honduras. Given the extent it's kind of hard to to to address this

Violence

because my understanding is there was an incredible amount of repression going on and that it was most on part of the government. If we cannot accept the truth commissions assessment where could we, how can we sort of arrive at what the truth is down there. Not that the truth is pretty illusive arrive at a close approximation of what happened.

Abrams:



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Well, I think we have a close approximation in the sense that we know that most of the violence most of the certainly the death squad killings and most of the violence came from the military because they had a lot more fire power than the FMLN. They were bigger in terms of the number of people at the height of it anywhere, I don't know, anywhere from 3:1 to 10:1. Now,

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then if you try to go from that and say most, well but does that mean 55% or 85 %. I don't know, I don't think there was any persuasive mechanism to establish that in the truth commission report. But another question is this: 70,000 people were killed in the civil war. I have never heard anybody tell how that figure arose. It isn't really much more horrendous than 50,000. Those were horrifying numbers. Maybe it's 80,000. That's also a horrifying number. The truth is no one seems to know. I don't know if it's all that important whether the number is 60 or 70 thousand because those are terrible numbers for a country the size of El Salvador or any country.

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Similarly, the amount of oppression and abuse was horrifying and I don't know if it matters if it was

62% or 68% or 70% the military. I don't find any Salvadoreans who think that is an important question to settle in the mid-1990's. I find people who worry about that tend to be in Washington but in San Salvador they are trying, I think, to get beyond that and not play a numbers game that cannot ever be settled.

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Question:

You said in your book that you used to be a democrat. What changed it? Made you change your life?

Abrams:

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Well, I was a hard-line democrat George ??, Scoop Jackson were in the party. I think partially what happened was everybody in the party was marginalized, largely felt rejected and the party has a view of foreign policy and that's not it. Part of it was that Jimmy

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report by the secretary of state that just came out on Panama and El Salvador commending the embassy for the veracity of its reporting during the war. And yet, there is a sense here in the States that a lot of the things that went on in El Salvador never got back, a lot of information about the atrocities and about various other reports; that the reporting was not very good in terms of informing the public about a lot of what was going on down there. How do you explain that gap, that information gap?

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Abrams: I will make two points. First: I think it is very important to distinguish between the US government and private groups. If you are running a human rights group or church group or if you're

a journalist and somebody comes to you with an accusation that something happened and that so and so is involved in it you can say that. The standard of proof that the US government got to require is higher. Before the government officially says "that man is involved in death squad activities" or officially says this is what happened, fact, you need to be pretty sure you're right. You need to have plenty of evidence that you're right. Otherwise you shouldn't be saying that. It's too important for the government. So, that is I think a partial explanation for the difference in what others said and what the government said. If you would ask anybody in the US embassy or for that matter in the State department in 1985: Do you think

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Carter happened. I thought he was a very bad president. And part of it was I became more conservative on domestic policy issues. Jackson and Meaney were the old, you know Lyndon B. Johnson, Harry Truman, *Stiles* ~~star~~ democrats, very much big government men. And I stopped believing that. At which point there is really no reason if you don't ... (?) all.

Question: Right. Right.

Abrams: So...

SIDE 2

Question: Ok, so where were we. Oh, I wanted a little bit to talk about the whole information process of information coming from El Salvador to the US. You said that the information that you got came from the embassy and there was just a

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that Daubisson is involved in death squads, do you think that he is involved in the killing of the arch bishop? Every single person would have said yes. Privately, and no one publicly because we didn't have evidence that proved it. And secondly I would say is which you're getting now is revisionist history by the people who were around in El Salvador and who are just trying to rewrite what happened. [Everybody knew there were massive human rights violations in El Salvador. Everyone. The debate in congress was over what to do about it. Jimmy Carter, before leaving office in January 1981 decided to arm those viscious, bloody Salvadorean officers. Jimmy Carter. He knew about the human rights violations. So did the Democrats on the Hill.] Ronnie came

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along and we said that's the right policy. We should continue to arm while trying to reform the military. The argument was: No You shouldn't, they're just too bloody, stay away from them vs: well, we should try to reform while at the same time we have to prevent a communist victory and we can get the level of violence down by modernizing and improving that military.) That were the arguments. The democrtas who voted for those programs, knew what they were doing they knew that Carter had given that military aid. They knew that President Duarte granted the military aid. When Duarte came to Washington the first people he saw were Father Hesperh, and Ted Kennedy and Jim Wright and those were not Republicans. And they were supporting Duarte and they

supporting his government and they were supporting his military. To come back now and say we really didn't know the human rights abuses how come the state department didn't tell us that's baloney, that's nonsense, that is not so. They knew, they're rewriting history.

Question:

Okay, then as a follow-up to that two things in particular jump to mind and I'm not quite sure this so much has to do with the government but in the general information network El Mozote, when Norman *Ray Bonner* Balmer (?) came back and reported for the NY Times that there had been a massacre and ...but it was never fully investigated. There was even, there was some talk of it there being a cover-up about it because the government didn't want

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people to know about it. How would you respond to something like that?

Abrams:

I think El Mozote taken out of a State Department report. As I recall the situation there were reports that something had happened in this little village in or around this little village which seemed to be a village of 200-300 people, in territory completely controlled by the FMLN. The numbers that were reported 700 or 800 people killed seemed to be inconsistent with the number of people living there. A). B): it was impossible for the embassy to find out by sending somebody there because they couldn't get there because it was FMLN territory.

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C: the FMLN did not instantly claim there's been a huge massacre. The FMLN was quiet for a while which was also inconsistent with the notion that there had been a big massacre. The embassy was unable to get to the spot and determine according to its reporting to the department that there had been a massacre.

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Again: Standards of proof. How do you say there was a massacre if you don't know for a fact that there was? Well, the NY Times reporter said that there was. Here you get into the problem of advocacy journalism. Ray Balmer had reported only a matter of weeks before then that Americans, American soldiers were teaching torture to Salvadorean soldiers and sitting there while they practiced torture on their prisoners. A viscious, despicable lie. Few weeks go by and Ray Balmer reports there is a big massacre in El Mozote. Why would anybody in the US government believe Ray Balmer's story? He had proved to our satisfaction,

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with his story about torture that he was a repoter who was pro-FMLN and was not a professional and was not a responsible journalist and therefore his stories were discounted. So, that is what happens when a reporter does not act as a professional journalist. He hurts the cause he thinks he may be helping. He certainly hurts the cause of professional journalism. If a reporter who had been responsible and fair-minded and reported accurately had reported on Mozote the reaction might have been different. The Ray Balmer actually hurt that a great deal because because of the torture stories which I think one can now see, as we saw then were not true.

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Question:

Yeah, I've heard a lot about the torture thing as well and I've wondered about that, the idea that as part of the US training and the military advising that went on there was in fact a training that had to do with training to torture. He printed that and you say that it

torture

was a lie. Can you tell me what the proof is that it was a lie?

Abrams: Well, I can never prove it to you. The proof is: US government, US military under for example people like General Galvin, later NATO commander, I believe at that period the 7th Commander would never countenance (?) teaching torture.

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do it. So, we knew what was being
taught by the military. I would put
the shoe on the other foot: - in
that sense I reject the question -
you are accusing the US government
of teaching torture and of
torturing Salvadoreans? You prove
it. You prove, Mr. Balmer. Where is
the evidence of this? Show me the
12 sergeants who were teaching
torture to the Salvadoreans. Show
me the Salvadoreans who were
tortured by American soldiers, or
in the presence of American
soldiers. That is not what we were
doing in El Salvador. And that is
one of the reasons the Salvadorean
military one of the reasons the
level of violence came down and the
Salvadorean military stopped
engaging in torture, stopped
murdering prisoners was our
training. There was a point in te

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early 80's when there were very few FMLN prisoners because when they got somebody from the FMLN they murdered him. It was US military training that said again: it's immoral, it's against the laws of war and even if you don't care about that it's stupid, don't do it because if you do that no one will ever surrender, he'll fight to the death which is crazy from a military point of view. That's what the training was.

032004

Question:

Okay. One thing I sort of want to follow up to that Question: one of the things that I understand is that there were a lot of atrocities going on, there were human rights violations but that we were funding the military because we believed in the struggle against Communism. What...One of the problems...I've

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talked to a lot of people I'm trying to find out so what is your problem with El Salvador and what you know about it, etc and one of the things was that Ok, the government didn't know, didn't have proof for a lot of the human rights violations but there were a certain amount of knowledge that there were bad things going on and how could we continue to fund at the level we were funding at 1,1- 1,3 million dollars a day or something. How could we continue to fund a regime that even if we had no proof, even if we didn't know for sure, why wasn't there more accountability as to how that money was being spent, even if we didn't know for sure?

032104 A: Well, everyone knew there were massive human rights abuses in El Salvador. The Democrats who voted for that money; Jimmy Carter, when he gave

them that money at the end of his presidency and all the Democrats who supported it during the 80's because we got congressional majority for that money time after time after time. Everyone knew that there massive amounts of human rights violations. The debate was over: how can you get them down? By engagement or disengagement? And that was a perfectly reasonable debate, I mean both sides had an argument to make. I think in that respect it's clear that we were right. You do it by engagement, 'cause we did engage and the level of violence and the level of human rights abuses did in fact come down pretty steadily in the course of the eighties. (Now, why do you give people military aid if they are engaged in human rights violations? You know, you can ask this to the democrats in congress who voted for aid to the Afghan guerrillas, who vote for aid to Turkey, who vote for aid to any of dozens of countries where there are some human rights violations. You do it in part because you think there is a national security argument here, that is, we will need to stop an FMNL victory. You do it because of a human

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rights point of view you believe an FMLN victory will destroy any chance of a democratic El Salvador. You do it in part because you believe that engagement will bring the level of violence down fast. Now, I think we proved that the latter is true because if you look at the level of human rights violations the day President Carter decided to go ahead and give them military aid to the day to the day Reagan left office it's a fairly steady slope down.) The number by death-squad killings decreases by 98% or some figure like that. The figures are not scientific. A lot, that's the point. The level of human rights abuses decreases enormously in that period. So, one of the reasons you continue to vote that is you believe that that will happen and then when the years go by you believe it is happening and you want it to continue. And believe, an FMLN victory will set up a permanent dictatorship in El Salvador.

Question: One of the things that the process that the Reagan Administration had to go through to deliver military

aid was a sort of certification process and from my understanding and from a lot of the reading that I have done that certification process was a little there was some scepticism about it in terms that claiming that human rights were respected and human rights abuses were in fact deminishing in order to justify more military aid when in fact there was really no proof that human rights violations were in fact going down as you just said. How would you respond to that?

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Abrams:

→ Well, first: what did we have to certify? We did not have to certify a good human rights situation. We had to certify progress. I think, if you look back at the 80's from the vanishing point of the 90's it's quite true that there was

progress. I think those certifications look better even now than they did when we made them. You said there was cynicism about the process. There was. There was cynicism everywhere about the certification progress.

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↳ Certification process was a bad procedure and it was a congressional cop-out. What do you do when you are a senator or a congressman or congresswoman and in your district there are various groups, conservative groups, veteran groups and so forth screaming at you Give aid to El Salvador and stop the comunists. And there are church groups and human rights groups and liberal groups that are saying Don't give aid to those murderers. Well, what you could do is you could step up to the plate. You could take a

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position. You could say Here is what I believe, and take the heat from the side that you disagree with. But congress didn't want to do that. They wanted to have it both ways. This is not a unique situation for congress but they wanted to have it both ways. So what do they do? They invented this certification procedure, whereby they could say to the liberal and church groups and human rights groups: I didn't vote for that aid, I demanded certification and they won't get a dime and don't want them to have a dime unless.. and then they could say to the conservative groups and veteran groups and all: I voted for the aid, granted the administration will have to certify but we think they will, so everybody goes away happy. But it's a fraudulent

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procedure, by a congress that will not take the responsibility by making a decision to vote for the aid or to cut off the aid. Now, we did not think that the certifications were impossible. They were difficult in a sense that there were a tremendous number of human rights abuses. But we were asked to certify progress and there was progress and you can just if you tried to graph the level of human rights abuses it went down.

Question:

Okay, one more question about this and then we can get to the present. If in fact - I want to talk about the White Paper a little bit. And first let me ask you: what is your opinion on the White Paper? Was it an accurate appraisal of the situation?

Abrams:

I...Let me go back to 1981. I was assistant secretary for international organizations then and had just, really did not follow it. It was just not my ??

03 2620

Question:

So, could you make any kind of statement (Abrams interjects:No.) that it was accurate or inaccurate.

Abrams:

No, it was really something that happened when I was just, if I remember the timing right either in IOL or just moving to the human rights bureau and it was really not something I was involved in.

Question:

Allright, Okay. What is your current position on El Salvador?

Abrams:

I was in El Salvador in June 93 and it's a wonderful place to visit. Everything that Americans

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hoped would happen in El Salvador is beginning to happen. The war is over, the respect of human rights is enormously increased. The political system is much much more open and more democratic. The full spectrum from left to right is represented. The economy is coming back. It is a much better country than it was ten or fifteen years ago. It's a much better country than it's ever been in term of equality, democracy, free expression. And in that sense it is a wonderful victory for American policy as well as and much importantly a victory for the Salvadorean people.

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Question:

In El Salvador and particularly among the FMNL of course the sense is that the only reason that peace really came is because the FMNL

demonstrated that they could not be beaten militarily. That it was not, in fact, a situation where everybody realized that peace was a better path than war. How do you respond to that? In other words because I was speaking with Mr.?? over in House of Representatives and he was saying that El Salvador was a tremendous victory for the US military position when in fact the other side of the argument is that in spite of the US military position and in spite of all the money that was put in there the FMLN pulled off a stale-mate. How would you respond to that?

Abrams:

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I think that's almost exactly wrong. Almost. The FMLN was fighting for a communist El Salvador and wanted to achieve power through force and arms not

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through the ballot box and wanted to get rid of the army. They wanted to get hold of the government and the state and to replace it as happened in Nicaragua. Well, that's not what they agreed to in the end. What they agreed to in the end was basically to give it up in exchange for certain reforms which were reforms you know most Americans would think to be very good ones. Reforms in the army, guarantees of an open political system, concern about re-integrating the FMLN guerrillas into society. They lost. I think that the reason the FMLN agreed to take its chances at the ballot-box the reason is that they lost the war. They came to understand that they could not attain power through military means. Therefore there were two options. One was to try it at the

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ballot-box and for that El Salvador had to be reformed so that they could have a fair shot. That couldn't have happened in 1981. While the alternative for the FMLN was go on fighting in the hills for ever but they would never win a military victory and I think what really changed for the FMLN was what happened in Nicaragua and what happened in the Soviet Union. They would never have agreed to come in from the hills and give up the war if Communism hadn't collapsed around the world, if the Soviets hadn't disappeared, if the Soviets hadn't actually abandoned them even before they disappeared, if the Sandinistas hadn't lost an election, the whole situation of a communist guerrilla group everywhere in the world particularly on the borders of

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Nicaragua changed and they understood that history was not in their favour. And they made what I think was a very intelligent decision which was to say Well, let's not stay up here in the hills fighting for no reason forever. Let us, this country is reformed enough now for us to try a round of politics lets do it. And that was for some of them a brave decision and certainly from the point of view of El Salvador a correct decision.

Question:

One thing that I have heard from a lot of people down there was that in fact the FMLN had offered to negotiate without preconditions several times in fact had written a letter to I believe President Reagan or ??. My question is if in fact the had offered to negotiate .

before without preconditions why,
if the idea had been to stop the
violence and stop the killing why
wouldn't that offer had been taken
up?

Abrams:

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The FMNL offered to negotiate
periodically and what they were
negotiating was a share of power.
The FMLN never until the end when
they essentially gave it up agreed
to negotiate a settlement in which
they gave up their arms and the
army didn't give up its arms they'd
lay down their arms, they came down
from the hills and they gave up
guerrilla war in exchange for no
share of power \whatsoever. they
repeatedly made negotiating offers
in the course of the 1980's which
were offers that said You give up;
or offers that said Here are the 6
ministries that we want but maybe

we'll take five; that said We need to be integrated in the army and become the army; as happened in Nicaragua. What they were unwilling to do until the end, until communism collapsed and the Sandinistas lost and the Soviets abandoned them they were unwilling to say: Okay, now we negotiate a settlement in which we loose the war and we lay down our arms unilaterally because the army has not to lay down its arms and we just try it politically. You couldn't have gotten that agreement until the very end from the FMLN. Because, for the obvious logical reasons: why should they give up in 1982,3,4? Why should they make that deal, from their point of view?

Question:

Yeah, I was going to say, given the level of violence that was going on at that time would it have

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been a fair, a conceivable idea to have them lay down their arms and submit to the political process, do you think?

Abrams:

Well, from their point of view it wouldn't have taken part because they more of them at that point I think were still communists. I think that one question that arises now and it is a question we will see played out in the 90's: How many of them, by today, are not communists, really do not believe in democratic centralism or leninist -system government, really are democrats now? Certainly the answer is some and we'll see how many. I think it was also true that many of them would have generally feared laying down their arms and if you'd had, if they'd had given up in 1981 or 2 let's say many of

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them would have had to leave the country. Would have had to go to Nicaragua at that point probably for their own safety.

Question: As of today, what is your evaluation of the peace process that's going on down there and what do you see as one of the possible scenarios of the election in 94?

Abrams:

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Well, I think you have to acknowledge the success. The peace process is working. You could quibble with it. You could say it took too long or this position is wrong but that's quibbling. The idea of the peace process was to get the state and the guerrillas to sit down and negotiate a deal which ends the civil war in El Salvador. Which produces an El Salvador where disputes are fought

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out politically. And that's what happened, so it's a great success. I think it's going to stick, too. I say that because there's only been one big break in the peace process, or two, you might say. One was the delay in respect to the officers being cashiered by President Christiani and that looked very troublesome and it was, but it worked out, and those officers are going to go and the peace process will stay on track. The second was the discovery of the tremendous amounts of FMNL arms hidden in Managua. It was a violation of the peace process too because they had promised to give up all their arms. In E Salvador, this is being handled politically. The right way. The government is not saying Oh well, they should all be shot and the peace process is all over.

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What's happening is the Urena party is saying: See, you can't trust them both, vote for us. It's being handled in a context of the political campaign, which is a good thing. In other words, people are saying to the Salvadorean people: You got to decide whom you want to trust and whom you want to run the country, and this is our newest argumet against the FMLN and the FMLN is defending itself in various ways. So that's great. That's how you want these events to be handled. Politically, not by an other recourse to arms. So I'm really quite optimistic. Having survived the problem of reform of the military thus far and having survived the problem of FMLN cashes in Managua thus far I think that it will work.

Question:

What do you think is the future of the left in El Salvador?

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Abrams:

That is a very, very interesting question. In my conversations, the few I have had with Salvadorean leftists the question I have put to them is one economics, largeley. That is, it is clear that they portray themselves as democrats; people who are not going to go back to arms, they want your vote. They are playing within the rules of the game now and with time we'll see if that's true and it's obvious that in many cases they mean it. What about the economic promises? What are they selling? Are they selling the old-fashioned socialist approach which is now unpopular in Latin America, for the moment at least. Are they selling a modified Christiani approach in which they

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say Yes, we do the reforms and we'll do them more slow and we'll cushion the blow/ Is there no distinction, at this point? Have they basically bought the view that yeah we're all economic liberals now and you'll see we will run an even tighter ship than Christiani? I don't really get much of an answer to that question. I don't hear the FMLN saying a hell of a lot about their economic process. Probably, because they're working on developing one. They are faced with a world very different from the one in which they initially came to their views on economics. They beter answer that question because I think the average Salvadorean with the problem of war now solved the average Salvadorean wants to know about jobs and te only way the FMLN is going to get a

vote from such Salvadorean is by convincing him and her that they can handle the economy.

Question: One of the things that I understood when I was down there is that the FMLN acknowledged the fact that they cannot win the presidential election. It just does not have the popular support. So the idea is that if a coalition can be formed the center and left of the Christian democrats the MNR, the FMLN then they might have a chance. Do you think that's realistic? Do you think that can happen given your knowledge of the situation?

Abrams: I think it is. I think it is correct that the FMLN can win seats in parliament but can't alone win the presidency, and there will be

a, basically this will be a 2 candidate election it gets out with. There will be a right candidate and a left candidate. Now, the left candidate will not be very left. It may be a christian democrat - Chavez ?? versus the Urena candidate. But I think it is quite plausible that the FMLN is going to get seats through their political representhatives, their party is going to get seats in parliament and is going to be a real political force. And I think it is quite plausible they'll be part of a winning coalition. The Urena candidate, Calderon is not as a attractive a candidate as an individual as Christiani was, I think. And it is quite plausible, to me that in the first round Calderon gets more votes than anyone else, any single other

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candidate. But in the second round, that there needs to be a second round and in the second round Chavez wins because he has everyone else behind him, the entire united left behind him. Quite plausible. My, the people I talked to about it in El Salvador said they thought it was a very plausible scenario.

Question:

Yeah, you sort of anticipated my question. Calderon is known to be sort of a hard-liner being more to the right. Why do you think Urena, in its bid to be seen as more of a center party, as more of a moderate party. Why do you think they chose such a conservative candidate?

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Abrams:

Urena
Mureno (?) was chosen from a relatively small list of people. And it was choosing the, you might say, the party candidate. My

understanding is that Calderon having been in the party since the beginning having been maybe this is a unfair term - party apparatchik- had the party mechanism and it was impossible not to give him the nomination. There were other people outside their party structure, business people, for example who might have been more telegenic candidates, who might have been better candidates from that point of view. But Calderon was the party stalwart and he had the party mechanism and so he was able to get the nomination. Now, if he loses they'll have learned the lesson. The hard way.

Question:

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From the human rights stand point as the former head of the human rights bureau what, if any has been the principal lesson the US has

learned in the last 12 years in El Salvador and how will that affect or not affect US policy in the future?

Abrams:

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One could be cynical about this and say that everybody has learned a different lesson. It's kind of like what is the meaning of Vietnam and so there is no lesson that the country learns that everybody more or less accepts. And even more optimistic than that: I believe, that we have seen that we can become engaged in a terrible human rights situation and improve it. I hope that we have learned the lesson that walking away from a bad human rights situation is not necessarily the best idea. Roll up your sleeves and get deeply involved in it acknowledging how bad it is. Nevertheless, getting

Success

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deeply involved in it can work. Because I doubt that they would have made the human rights improvements that they did, when they did without constant American pressure, administration pressure, congressional pressure, human rights group pressure. Everybody's pressure of every kind. It worked, and I think that really is the lesson that we ought to take with us from El Salvador. This was a bi-partisan policy success.

SIDE 3:

Abrams: ...that really is the lesson that we ought to take with us from El Salvador. This was a bi-partisan policy success.

Question: What would you say in a slightly broader context, what if anything would you say the the US people, we

as a country as a nation what can we learn about ourselves through the situation in El Salvador and how we conducted ourselves. What can we learn about ourselves as a country?

Abrams:

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We have a problem today I think in responding to a question of what we can learn about El Salvador as a country because we got deeply engaged in El Salvador as a country. We spent a fortune of money in El Salvador. An incredible amount for the Salvadoreans, such a small country and we did it over an extended period of time, 15 years nearly and it worked. And I think on the one hand the lesson is we can be this successfully, we know something about pressure to improve the human rights situation, we know something about teaching people how

to for example improve the military in respect to human rights and how to establish a better system of justice and how to establish free elections. We also learned that it is very hard, very devisive, very expensive not only in terms of money but in terms of effort and time and it takes decades. [So, you know, it's a cautionary tale as well as a success-story. It is not something that you can do quickly, it is not something that you can do with a little foreign aid budget. It took an incredible enormous effort to achieve the success that I at least believe is there. It's a cautionary tale for involving yourself in a place like Somalia or Bosnia and thinking this is going to happen, you know, we'll send some aid, this can be done in 6 months. It's worth doing if you're

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willing to make the commitment. It took a tremendous commitment in El Salvador. I don't think we would have been able to sustain it unless it were not right here where we live and of obvious importance half a million Salvadoreans living in the US, maybe a million, who knows. So that's part of the story too. We can do this successfully, we can be a source for great, great improvement in the human rights situation and in the degree of democracy in a country like El Salvador. It is very hard and it takes a very long time.)

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Question:

As Americans, how do we balance our ideals of democracy with our covert involvement in other countries, sometimes necessary or maybe not, which often seem to contradict those values, especially now in

sort of the cold, post-cold-war period. One of the things we did yesterday is we went out to some of the monuments asking ordinary citizens: So, what do you know about El Salvador? And what do you think about your governments foreign policy, etc? And one of the main things I kept hearing was: Well, I don't know what the hell my government is doing in different countries and the only thing I know for sure is that they are not representing me, because I don't even know about the stuff that's going on. And, my question to you is really - and the impression I kept getting was people feeling it was really people vs. the government as opposed to being a part of it and feeling represented. What kind of insight can you give me into that? What ails us?

Abrams:

Well, this is a much bigger problem and the problem of the relationship between the people and the government is essentially a domestic problem. I think foreign policy is a smaller part of it. Everybody is against foreign aid.

634601 —

In the case of El Salvador, the American covert activities was not very large and it was certainly in the service of the overall policy. And if people didn't know what their government was doing in El Salvador it's their fault. It certainly was layed out there, congress knew and if anybody wanted to know all he or she had to do was write your congressman. Write your congressman, you'll find out. So the notion that there was a lot hidden going on is wrong. I don't think that the covert side in El Salvador is a very big deal. There

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are things that were done because the individuals involved, because the countries involved, other countries, third countries didn't know the name of the newspaper. A lot of what is done covertly is not done covertly because we are doing it covertly. It's because somebody else has some reason for saying: Let's do this without any publicity. And that which was done covertly was, as I say, normal operations here. It was all done, reported to the congress, approved by congressional intelligence committees and ^{not} really terribly controversial. But as I tried to explain before I am a little unsympathetic to the Americans who say Gee, we don't know, because the vast, vast, vast portion of what the government is doing at home as overseas is perfectly well

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available to them if they take the trouble to find out. I don't blame them for not taking the trouble. They have lives of their own. It's not surprising if they don't want to know what's going on in US policy towards - choose your country - Burma today. But I wouldn't blame the government for that.

Question:

As a person who's been in the government and is an articulate spokes-man what do you think - this kind of brings us back to the broader question of sort of what ails us in terms of the relationship with the government to the people. What do you think is going on here and what can we do about it or what do you think the nature of that is?

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Abrams:

My experience in the State department doesn't give in think special insight to what is a very important philosophical question. Except in one sense, that American people don't put foreign policy very high on their personal agenda.

Again: I think, particularly now with the Cold War over that's not surprising. The survival of the country is no longer at stake, we don't have the Cold war you know, that we've got to be worried about what happens everywhere because the Russians might do something there so they might go Communist. That argument is over. Therefore the degree of attention we need to pay to a lot of spots around the world, not Central America , I think 'cause it's right here but there're a lot of places around the world it was reduced. But one think we do

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learn is that the average American is concerned about his or her health, life, family, work and domestic affairs a hell of a lot more than foreign affairs. And that, we're lucky. I mean that in a certain sense is how it should be. We're lucky to be a big and powerful country and not to have to worry quite so much as in Israel or Belgium about foreign and security policy.

Question:

Why do you think Americans have become so disillusioned with their government? I am asking you sort of also as someone who's been in the government and worked in the government and also as someone who's felt to be victimized by the government in terms of Iran-Contra.

Abrams:

Again, that is a very big

philosophical question. I think it is partially that it really is true that the government is incredibly big now and a lot of what is done is done at the highest level than the most local level. I don't think people feel quite as distanced from their ?? government, from their state assembly and their senator even from their governor as they do from Washington. Now, it's partly I think because the Federal Government has gotten to be exceptionally large by any historical value and very very distant and opaque in the sense that you can't figure out what is costing so much money and what benefits are coming from a great deal of that activity. I am also a critic of congress. I think that congress is part of the problem. When you have an appropriations

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bill that is as thick as one or two or ten telephone books that is not done in a way that's not designed in a way for people to make it easier to figure out what is going on and it doesn't make it easier to figure it out. And I am a critic also because we often had to put our necks on the line in the executive branch and say we are for this and not for that and I am a critic of the unwillingness of many members of congress to do that. I am a critic of the escape patches and vows that are constantly being devised to allow members to not state a firm position and take the consequences. And I think, I think the congress is at fault in this way, meaning the so-called imperial congress. I think when you see the percentage of re-election that you do and the way in which members

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Salvadoreans is that we should get the hell out. By that I mean that the Salvadoreans have lived through a decade and a half of dependence on us. Now, I think that was a good thing in the sense that you know I was for those 8 bills and I think we had to help them fight the FMLN and so forth. Nevertheless, they became too dependent. Decisions were being made in Washington, whether they were being made in the White House or Capitol Hill or something. That's bad for any country and one of the great things now is they can and will start going down. Their economy will start growing more and they can be much more self-sufficient. And the decisions about their economic policy and their foreign policy and so forth will be made in San Salvador by Salvadoreans. The role

have created this self-perpetuating system in which virtually everyone is re-elected until very recently until we've had revolts. It's a bad system. But I think the heart of it may be that so much has moved to Washington. It's not surprising that people feel more distant from the government. That is very distant from them. And maybe if more of it went back to the states and cities and academies that would help.

Question:

Well, now that peace has been achieved what constructive role do you see the US playing in El Salvador?

Abrams:

Let's end with this 'cause I will have to run (OK). One of the wonderful things about peace in El Salvador is wonderful for the

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of the American ambassador which was necessarily huge should diminish now while the role of the Salvadorean legislature and president increases. So, one of the things we ought to do is stop being such big-shots in El Salvador. Not overnight. I do not think we should cut the aid-budget overnight but I think we should cut it steadily. I think what we should be trying to do is help the Salvadoreans trade with the US. I think the one thing that we owe them in addition to the normal efforts we make to help friendly countries one special thing: The lot of Salvadoreans who are here stay here. They aren't making any trouble for us, they are hard-working people and the remittences that they send home are helping to keep that economy afloat. I think it would be a

terrible thing to cut them off and try to send them home. Terrible and inhumane. And terrible for El Salvadoreans' development. But other than that I think the single influence and presence of the United States in El Salvador is one way of measuring the victory of the policy. It gets to be a self-sufficient country again.

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Question:

Just one more question, quick one: With the new, the end of the Cold War and the new administration those two things both sort of separately how do you think how will that affect foreign policy in Latin America how will the end of the cold war, the communist threat being gone how will all that change and, also, how do you see the Clinton administration dealing with it?

Abrams:

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One thing that the end of the Cold War does is to eliminate the, obviously, struggle over Latin America with the Soviets. To a certain extent during the Cold War every single piece of Latin America was important to us and equally important to us. You know, when Castro sends Che Guevara to Bolivia we have to fight Che Guevara in Bolivia. When it's Grenada it's Grenada, if it's El Salvador, it's El Salvador, if it's Chile it's Chile. It doesn't matter. It's everywhere. That's over. Therefore, the importance of Latin American countries now varies. How big are they, how close to us are they, how prosperous are they. It is no longer the case that, you know, a country such as Paraguay or Peru is as important as it once might have been. It is no longer the case

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that Peru is as important as it once might have been. Or Bolivia. Now, there's a whole different set of ways to measure and much more in a certain sense fundamentally logical way of measuring. So some countries are going to be less important than others are more important and they have much more control over it now. I mean Chile is more important now because it's an economic success, Argentina is more important because lot of Americans are going to inves there. So that's a change. The second change, I think is that the most important issue now is trade. 10, 20, 30 years ago it was security. Aid was important , too, much less now. The key issue is trade. When we meet with Brazilians, Argentines, Mexicans, Salvadoreans more and more the issue is already

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and will be increasingly trade issues. And one way of saying this is get the governments out of the way. The key during the cold war the key relationship was between the US government and the government of country A, B, or C. After the Cold war that shouldn't be true. The key relationship is between Americans and Argentines or whatever the nationality is and between the two economies, American business men and women, Argentine business men and women with the governments playing a much reduced role.

Question: What do you think of the North American Free Trade Agreement? Do you think it should be in El Salvador?

Abrams: I think the I am very much in

favour of the Nort American Free Trade Agreement. I think it's important however, to include all of Central America and the Carribbean in it very fast because otherwise you are setting up an envidious situation between Mexico and the Caribbean base there. And you're going to disadvantage countries like El Salvador. Investors will say I'm better off in Mexico. I'll put the factory in Mexico and they will disinvest in Central America and the Caribbean. That is not in the interest of the United States and I think that it's important that they get to join the Free Trade Agreement quickly.

Question: I had one impression about your book, and we're done with this (OK), but I do have one more question if you wouldn't mind

answering it. When I was reading your book on due process and I said ??? I found the most compelling things really when you talked about justice and the injustice that was being perpetrated against your own family sort of big as you described it financially inexhaustible, unaccountable you know monolith, this Lawrence Walsh and his gang. And I was wondering, I couldn't help thinking as I read this book drawing a little bit of a parallel between what was happening to you and what it must have sort of been like for Salvadoreans to feel pursued and harassed by their own government. And I was wondering and I know this is a real abstract question but I was wondering did that experience at all sensitize you or help you relate more to the plight of the Salvadorean people in

being victimized by their government as you were being victimized by your government and not only having their legal rights violated but in fact their more basic human rights?

Abrams:

I don't think I would draw that parallel. I think what sensitized me more was that before being assistant secretary for Latin America being assistant secretary for human rights and had dealt with people human rights activists, labor leaders who had experienced not just injustice, murder of family members and colleagues at the hands of their government. I would say that the experience sensitized me more to this sense that we were talking about a bit before: what makes people alienated from their government. The sense

that government is a huge monolith that you can't quite get at, you can't fathom, you can't change, you can't reach. I don't think that was the problem in El Salvador. The problem in El Salvador was that one part of the government, the military, was ready to kill you, or torture you, not only if you were the FMLN but even if you weren't in the FMLN because they would think you might be. And that was a much worse problem I mean the problems we had to deal with, that I had to deal with are quite small when compared to the problems people had to deal with in El Salvador or any other country where the government is not unjust it was murderous. But I think, to me it's been very interesting to get letters since the book is out for people all over the country saying I have

experienced things just like yours in a certain way and a lot of people had experiences which they interpret this way meaning the government does something which doesn't seem right. You can't quite fathom why you're doing it, you can't get them to stop doing it, you can't quite figure out whom to talk to to get them to stop doing it. On and on it goes. It doesn't quite it's not quite clear why it benefits the government to keep doing what it's doing yet it keeps doing with inexhaustible resources. So I think what it did sensitize me to more was the number of americans out there who actually do feel extraordinary alienated from their government and the number who believe and it's got to be the case that in some percentage of the cases they are right believe they

are being treated unjustly by their government.

Question: If you could make just one statement to the American people I just kind of thought of this you could make one statement to the American people if you could have them all sitting in front of you what would you say about ourselves, about El Salvador, what would you say?

Abrams:

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I would say there is a big debate after the war in Vietnam in this country whether our actions overseas did good or did more harm than good, intentionally or unintentionally. That was really the debate we were having in Central America, ~~again~~. Are we doing any good or are we doing harm. Now, El Salvador is a case study because

it shows how much great we are capable of doing and did and helped making that a much better, a much freer, a much more just and equitable society than it ever was. It's hard, it's expensive and it takes time and we should not get into that kind of committment unthinkingly or easily. But we can do it and we should never doubt our capacity for doing good around the world. And when we do that she should go back and look at El Salvador where we helped a great deal in revolutionizing what had been a terribly, terribly unjust society and making it a much better place.

Question: Alright then and thank you very much.

Abrams: You're welcome.